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ABSTRACT

Developed at the beginning of the decade to serve as a union catalog for identifying the holdings in all University of California (UC) libraries, the MELVYL online catalog as of October 1989 contained 10 million holdings for over 5 million monographic titles of print and nonprint materials, and more than 1.2 million periodicals holdings which represent nearly 650,000 additional titles. MELVYL, which is constantly evolving to meet user needs, currently provides a union catalog of UC's 100 libraries, the California State Library, and the libraries of the 32 California State Universities, Stanford University, The University of Southern California, the Center for Research Libraries, and the J. Paul Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. Several features of the system are designed to instruct users in accessing the catalog, including "News," "Help," and "Explanation" screens. Supplemental information and instructional materials are provided by two serial publications that are also available on line. The catalog is operational in three modes--"Lookup," the simple mode; "Command," which is faster and more flexible; and "Experimental," which can be added to either of the other two. MELVYL has the following advantages: it is fast, allowing combined concepts and cumulative searching; it is both current and retrospective; and it can be limited by dates, languages, locations, and boolean logic. A major disadvantage is a high rate of failure in subject searching, which may be attributed to the fact that only Library of Congress subject headings are used, and access to the subject heading list is not yet available directly on line. (SD)

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Opening Access to the University of California Libraries

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Introduction

This paper introduces the MELVYL® online catalog of the University of California to the research community. It is an important bibliographic and reference tool of which most scholars are unaware. While the catalog was developed to serve as a union catalog for identifying holdings in all University of California libraries, it has the capacity to do far more and is continuously evolving in response to users' needs.

The University of California's nine campuses are public institutions and their libraries are open to the public. Their collections are available for anyone to use on location and to a lesser extent to borrow through interlibrary loan. The acess considered here is through the public online catalog first available at the beginning of this decade. As of October 1989 the database contained over ten million holdings for over five million monographic titles of print and nonprint materials. It contained 1,216,109 holdings for periodicals representing 641,197 additional titles.

History

The MELVYL online catalog was developed by the Division of Library Automation (DLA) at the University of California in Berkeley as part of the Office of the Assistant Vice President for Information Systems and Administrative Services, Office of the President and University-wide Services. MELVYL is a registered trademark of the Regents of the University of California. A prototype version of the catalog became available to library patrons in 1981. The production version discussed here first became available in 1983. Since that time, it has developed in size and sophistication as funding permitted, given the array of priorities generated by users.

Instruction

The main source of instruction for using the system is the MELVYL catalog itself. News, Help, Explanation, and other informational screens are available online, as is an extensive glossary. Supplemental information and instructional materials are provided by two serial publications, DLA Bulletin and Mynd of MELVYL (known as MOM), which are also available online. Use the Show

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Publications command to see them. Printed guides are produced at individual campus libraries. The best known and most complete is a flip chart originally from the U.C. Berkeley Library now produced by the User Services Group. Bibliographic and system use questions can also be sent any time by Comment command or directed by telephone to the DLA Helpline between 8:00a.m. and 5:00p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays at (415) 987-0555. A reference manual with detailed information(MELVYL Online Catalog Reference Manual, January 1988) is available from the address at the end of the paper.

Scope

The goal for the MELVYL catalog is to provide a union catalog of the holdings of the University of California's more than one hundred libraries. In the United States only the Library of Congress has a larger collection. In addition to listing UC materials, the catalog includes materials from the California State Library. The monographic holdings can be accessed in Lookup or Command mode by authors, titles, subjects (in various degrees of detail), and by control numbers such as LCCN, ISBN and ISSN. There is a wide choice of display options.

For serials, the periodical index includes holdings of the thirty-two California State Universities, Stanford University, the University of Southern California, the Center for Research Libraries, and the J. Paul Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. The scope of the serial collections of these libraries varies. They can be searched in the periodical index of Command mode by corporate authors, titles, or control numbers with various display options. Periodical articles are not listed in this index.

In addition to cataloged library holdings and texts of various materials, analytics for some periodical articles also are available in Command mode. A special project in progress at this time provides controlled access to the MEDLINE database. This project is funded by a grant fromt he National Library of Medicine. In the future other indexes and databases may be mounted on the MELVYL catalog as well. A CURRENT CONTENTS project is now in preparation.

Modes of Use

The MELVYL catalog is operational in different forms. "Lookup" is the simple mode. It is menu driven with fewer options, yet considerably slower to use. It contains only monographs and is intended for infrequent users. "Command" mode is faster and more flexible. It is suited to sophisticated searching and manipulation. It contains monographs, and periodicals. "Experimental" mode is an

enhancement that can be added to either "Lookup" or "Command" modes. It was first introduced in March 1986 to provide a means for experimentation with new options and encourage users to send their reactions to DLA. All modes are user friendly with clear, ordinary language and copious "Help" and "Explanation" screens.

Advantages

As with other online databases, an advantage in using the MELVYL catalog for bibliographic and reference searching is that it is fast and allows combined concepts and cumulative searching. It can be manipulated to build on results through the use of related terms. It is very current and yet retrospective. It can be limited by dates, languages, locations and boolean logic. The results of searches can be saved, reviewed, printed, or downloaded. Noteworthy features include:

1. There is no cost for using the system.

2. All subject areas are covered, including music, as well nonprint materials and government publications.

3. Coverage, while most inclusive for post 1980 imprints, is unlimited retrospectively.

4. Periodicals can be easily identified.

5. Searches can be saved selectively to form personal bibliographies of up to 200 items at a time.

6. Questions and suggestions can be communicated to DLA via the "Comment" command and answers will be posted online in the Comment file within two to four weeks in individually retrievable form.

7. Correct or authoritative forms of names or subject headings can be searched in the Authority/Heading file. Additional information on the history of name changes can also be found in this file.

Current Use Considerations

About one-third of all subject searches yield zero postings. In some part this is because only Library of Congress subject headings are used, and access to the subject heading list is not yet available directly online. An option that is available online is to use the desired subject(s) as keyword(s) in a title search and then to display the actual subject headings used. Another tactic is

to browse the subject index for usuable subjects. For zero results on author or title searches, sometimes less is better than more; truncation will solve the problem or use of the Authority/Heading file will help.

For common words in searches, where the system has to search over a thousand headings, it sends a "long search" message. These searches are troublesome to everyone because they slow down system response time overall and produce results that range unpredictability from zero to overwhelming. To avoid cycling through long searches, the system will advise users on partial results or a new read and qualify process. Some other caveats: series and proceedings can be in either the monographic or the periodical database, variant spellings will affect your results. Boolean operations should be carefully considered when combining "and" with "or".

To use the MELVYL catalog effectively to identify materials, locate materials, generate personal bibliographies, or to check spellings, name changes, publication dates, or to identify potential subject headings for searching other catalogs and databases, note that response time depends on the overall use of the system at any time. The MELVYL catalog is available twenty-four hours per day. Statistics are available online for use in planning access strategy.

Non Affiliated Users

Questions about procedures for remote access to this public database by researchers not affiliated with the University of California should be directed to Clifford A. Lynch, Director, Division of Library Automation, Office of the President, University of California, 300 Lakeside Drive, Floor 8, Oakland, CA 94612-3550; telephone (415) 987-0522.